

Technical Bulletin #16:

Vitamin A – An Essential Vitamin for Healthy Bodies

How does Vitamin A keep your body healthy?

- It keeps your eyes healthy and helps you to see better at night.
- It protects your body against illness and helps it recover more quickly after illness.
- It helps to form and maintain healthy bones, teeth, skin, and internal organs like your stomach and lungs.

What are the consequences of not getting enough Vitamin A?

- Vitamin A deficiency (VAD) is the major cause of night blindness. Pregnant women and children are particularly vulnerable.
- The lack of Vitamin A can also lead to increased risk of illness.

What foods are good sources of Vitamin A?

Many foods that you grow in your garden or that you can buy in local markets are excellent sources of Vitamin A. They include:

Dark green leafy vegetables:

- Morning glory
- Amaranth
- Kale
- Mustard greens
- Maroom leaves
- Pak choi
- Pumpkin leaves
- Ivy gourd vines



Yellow, orange and red vegetables

- Pumpkin
- Yellow and orange sweet potatoes
- Red sweet peppers
- Carrots



Yellow, orange and red fruit

- Ripe papaya
- Ripe mango
- Jack fruit
- Guava



Vitamin A is also found in animal foods such as lean red meat, liver and kidneys; fish, shrimp and mussels; and egg yolks.

Getting enough Vitamin A in your diet

It is important that everyone in your family eat lots of fruits and vegetables every day. Make sure that you choose different varieties and colors of vegetables.

- For babies younger than 6 months, the best source of Vitamin A is breast milk.
- Adding a small amount of cooked meat or fish, cooked pumpkin or cooked dark leafy greens to *bobor* will provide good sources of Vitamin for babies older than 6 months.
- Children should eat at least 2 to 4 servings of different fruits and vegetables every day. One serving equals 125ml.
- Teenagers and adults should eat 3-5 servings of vegetables and 2-4 servings of fresh fruit every day. One serving equals 250ml of raw leafy vegetables, or 125ml of other raw or cooked vegetables or fresh fruit.
- Pregnant women should increase the amount of Vitamin A intake each day. Women who are breast feeding should double the daily amount of Vitamin A.

In Cambodia, local health centers provide Vitamin A tablets for children and post-partum mothers:

- Children aged from 6 months to 5 years should take a Vitamin A tablet once every 6 months.
- Post-partum mothers should take Vitamin A tablets within 6 weeks after delivery.

How to prepare and store fruits and vegetables to keep Vitamin A

The longer that fruits and vegetables are exposed to air, light and ambient temperatures, the more nutrients they lose. The following are recommendations for preserving the nutrition value of fruits, vegetables and other foods that are rich in Vitamin A.

- Harvest fruits and vegetables or buy them in the market on a daily basis – if they are eaten immediately after harvesting, they have the most nutrients and the best taste.
- Many fruits and vegetables lose nutrients rapidly. For example, dark green leafy vegetables can lose up to 80% of their nutrients within 2 days of being harvested.
- Root vegetables such as sweet potatoes, carrots, onions or beets are different – they can be stored for longer periods in dark and cool places.



- Avoid bruising fruits and vegetables. When the skin of fruits and vegetables is damaged; exposure to air results in substantial loss of vitamins.
- Cut vegetables into large pieces to cook them and after cooking cut them into smaller pieces to serve. Cutting them into small pieces before cooking increases the surfaces from which vitamins can leach out.
- The best way to cook vegetables is to steam them. The hot steam locks in nutrients. Also, by avoiding contact with water, vitamins and minerals cannot leach out during cooking.
- If you cook vegetables in water, use only a small amount of boiling water and cook with the lid on for the shortest time possible. Steaming is another good way to cook vegetables to preserve Vitamin A.
- Do not throw away the water you use to cook vegetables. After cooking, the water is rich in vitamins. Use it to make sauces or add it to soups.
- Eat cooked vegetables as soon as possible after they are prepared.
- Do not keep or store cooked vegetables for a long time.
- Stir-frying meats and vegetables is a healthy cooking method because foods are cooked without water, in a small amount of oil and only for a few minutes on high heat. Stir-frying sears the outside of the meat or vegetables. This locks the nutrients inside.
- When stir-frying, meat and vegetables should be thinly sliced in order to cook faster.

Use oil or fats when cooking foods rich in Vitamin A

Cooking meats and vegetables in oil or adding animal fat will help your body to absorb the Vitamin A and will provide extra energy. When cooking food for infants, use only a very small amount of oil.

USAID-HARVEST

No. 46 Street 310 | Sangkat, Beong Keng Kang 1
Khan Chamkamorn | Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Tel: 855 (0) 23 996419

This bulletin is made possible by the support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The content is the sole responsibility of Fintrac Inc. and does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.